

v.58, no. 5 (Oct / Nov 2007)

SACRED JOURNEY



THE JOURNAL OF FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER ~ OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2007

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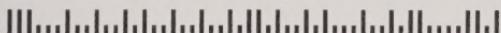
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A Light to the Nations

Ephraim Isaac



Some years ago as I spoke to the Ad Hoc Ethiopian Peace Committee (AHPC), I reminded my listeners that, "Peace is not just a passive state of mind or existence. Indeed if it is this, it will not be meaningful or lasting. Peace must be an active and dynamic human experience." As a peacemaker myself, dedicated to

Dr. Ephraim Isaac is known to many Ethiopians as a venerated teacher, an eminent statesman, an advocate of peace and civil rights. With pride and dignity he lays claim to his national heritage as an Ethiopian and his religious affiliation as a Yemenite Jew. Dr. Isaac pioneered the first organized campaign to eradicate illiteracy in Ethiopia (Fidel Serawit), impacting over 2.5 million Ethiopians over two decades. Dr. Isaac earned his M.Div and Ph.D. from Harvard University where he later became the first professor hired in Afro-American Studies. He is the author of numerous books and articles on Jewish and Ancient Ethiopic literature. He has lectured at Princeton University, as well as many other distinguished institutions of higher learning. Dr. Isaac speaks seventeen languages and was the first to translate Handel's Messiah into Amharic—Ethiopia's official language. He is featured in the book, Peacemakers in Action: Profiles of Religion in Conflict Resolution. As founder and President of The Peace and Development Organization, he continues his work to revitalize the power of the elders in forging a lasting peace in Ethiopian society. Dr. Isaac serves on the boards of many charitable and educational organizations, including Fellowship in Prayer.

building a sustainable peace in Ethiopia, I personally know Eliyahu McLean and Sheikh Bukhari, the Jerusalem Peacemakers, featured in this issue of SACRED JOURNEY. To raise religious voices in a call for understanding and peace, we joined with other Middle Eastern rabbis, imams and scholars at meetings in Brussels, Belgium in 2004 and Seville, Spain in 2006. We all share a strong belief that peace requires positive human interaction based on honesty and respect and that sustainable peace goes beyond an absence of conflict to the presence of reconciliation. It requires courage to commit to peace above all things, including personal interest and past hurts.

When it comes to the spirit of cooperation, many earthly creatures undoubtedly can and do put us to shame. When I was in elementary school in Ethiopia, a young fellow traveler and I were caught in heavy rain and could not cross a river. As we sat waiting for the water to subside, we suddenly noticed a caravan of ants crossing the river. The lead ant had dug its antenna firmly into the bank on the edge of the river on our side. The second ant crawled over the first and attached itself to it. The third crawled over them and did the same and so on until a veritable bridge to the other bank of the river had been formed over which all of the remaining ants could crawl to safety. Whether ants habitually cross rivers in this manner I do not know, but this amazing scene has remained engraved in my mind. Ants are typically celebrated for their industry but what impressed me most in this case was their spirit of total cooperation, working together in perfect harmony and humility—sacrificing self-interest for the common good. Perhaps there is something to be

learned here, a natural wisdom guiding the behavior of these little ants. To be a peacemaker you must be a person who serves without ulterior motives, using the fullness of your physical, psychological and spiritual energy to bring about peace and reconciliation.

From ancient to modern Israel, diversity has been a defining strength of the Jewish people. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is often focused on demarcations of the land. However, more important for reconciliation is transforming the demarcations in human hearts. In a world full of hate and prejudice, Israel can and must become "a light to all nations," an example of the possibility of harmonious coexistence among culturally diverse people. This is what our ancient great prophets foretold and they expect nothing less from us, their heirs. The deep yearning for peace is within each of us, whatever our religion or culture.

Peace is a motivation in itself, a way to live, and the manifestation of our hopes and prayers for the future. I pray that we will use energy and ingenuity in marshalling the resources of our various religious traditions to create peace in the Middle East and the world.

COMPANIONS ON THE JOURNEY

An Interview with

Eliyahu McLean & Sheikh Bukhari

Shalom-Salaam—Peace in the Middle East



Eliyahu McLean and Sheikh Abdul Aziz Bukhari are respectively the Jewish and Muslim co-founders and co-directors of the Jerusalem Peacemakers, a network of independent, interfaith peace builders, dedicated to promoting understanding, reconciliation and peace in the Holy Land, thereby hoping to make peace more attainable worldwide. They are tireless in their efforts, lecturing across the globe and leading people everywhere to embrace peace in their thoughts, words and actions.

Fellowship in Prayer was able to interview them between their speaking engagements; their first at a mixed Catholic-Protestant School in Ireland and the second at St. Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation in England, where their topic was

"The Temple Mount/Haram Ash-Sharif: Source of Conflict or Peace?" Final remarks were then taken from McLean while he was in Santa Fe, New Mexico teaching a week-long course entitled "Peace-Building 101" and from Sheikh Bukhari once he had returned home to the Holy Land. It seemed fitting that at the very moment Sheikh Bukhari was asked how he deals with militants and radicals who are not open to dialogue about peace, the shofar could be heard in the distance, sounding the call to prayer. "I must go," he said. As we placed the phone receiver in its cradle, we could not help but think that perhaps, prayer is indeed the most definitive answer to that question!

Fellowship in Prayer: Both of you have dedicated your lives to working for peace, especially in the conflicted area around the Holy City of Jerusalem—is there any one event or experience that stands out in your journey as the moment that set you on this course of peace?

Eliyahu McLean: For me, working for peace has been the unfolding of my life's journey. Living in Hawaii, at the age of twelve and searching for my identity, I was invited by my only Jewish friend to his bar-mitzvah. From the first moment I set foot in the synagogue, something resounded deep within me and I knew I had come home. After studying for a year to learn enough Hebrew I had a bar mitzvah of my own and became active in the Jewish youth group that sent me to Israel when I was 15. I fell in love with Israel and went back for two more years to live and study there. My interest in learning about the Palestinian narrative of the conflict led me to pursue Middle Eastern Studies at UC Berkeley. In 1997 I moved back to Israel to work for

peace, first living in the Muslim town of Tamra in the Galilee and then living in Jerusalem. Although I have become a leader in spiritually based Israeli-Palestinian peace projects, it's not always easy. When a Jewish friend was killed in a suicide bombing I had my doubts, but my friend's father said, "Eliyahu, I am counting on you to continue your work for peace."

Sheikh Bukhari: My story differs from Eliyahu's in that after the death of my father, it was both my duty and my choice to continue the work of my family. When my father passed away, I returned from living in the United States to carry on our tradition and walk in his footsteps. The Bukhari family has lived in Jerusalem for over 400 years— in 1616 my ancestors came from Bukhara to establish the Naqshabandi Sufi Center in Jerusalem. One of its goals was to create a bridge between religions. As a Sufi sheikh, it is my obligation to help the community. I initially chose to teach but then wanted to do more. I decided to try and establish interfaith dialogue between the Jews and Muslims to bring peace and reconciliation to these children of Abraham.

Can you tell us more about the Naqshabandi Center?

SB: My family came from the town of Bukhara in Uzbekistan to Jerusalem in order to teach Naqshabandi Sufi meditation and to aid Muslim travelers. The center became a meeting ground for pilgrims, a place to form a bridge of cooperation, understanding and love. The city of Jerusalem was meant to be a place for worship from the time of Abraham. We believe that heaven's gates are just above Jerusalem and living here means

being constantly beneath God's gaze. Guns, knives and hate in the heart should not be allowed in this city. At the Center we try to bring together people from different religions for the sake of peace.

How did the two of you come to work together?

SB: In 1999 I was first introduced to Eliyahu in Jerusalem and a short while later was invited to an inter-religious conference in Uzbekistan hosted by UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization).

EM: I was also invited to speak with Sheikh Bukhari at the conference in Bukhara. When I met him I felt an instant kinship. I thought he would be a partner with whom I could see eye to eye, someone who was equally committed to prayer and deep spiritual practice while at the same time trying to change the world. Sheikh Bukhari spoke the language of love and lived a life of peace.

I had studied both Jewish and Islamic mysticism, including Sufism in Egypt. Jewish and Sufi Muslim mystics have a long history of interaction, study, and prayer, inspired by the harmonious relationships that were formed in Andalusia during the Golden Age of Spain, as well as through the Jewish-Sufi movement in other countries. I was interested in seeking out Sufis because I wanted to find Palestinian Muslims who could present a heart-centered, tolerant face of Islam to the Israeli public and the wider world, challenging misconceptions about Islam and Muslims. When I met Sheikh Bukhari, I believed I could work with him to



bring the path of the mystics into Israeli-Palestinian peace work.

SB: In the town of Bukhara is a mosque named for my ancestor Imam Muhammad al-Bukhari, a famous scholar. He is recognized in the Muslim world as having collected and edited the most authoritative collection of *Hadith*, sayings and deeds of the prophet Mohammad. Eliyahu and I went to pray at his tomb and we felt that he was giving us his blessing to work together. We have been doing so ever since.

Where do you think peace begins?

SB: I believe it starts within yourself...within your family...within your neighborhood...within your country and then the rest of the world. You can't deliver peace to others if you do not have peace inside yourself.

EM: You have to find the balance between inner and outer peace. If you are involved with outer peace work, you need also to be engaged with the inner process. If you are focused on inner peace work, then you should take steps to help make the world a better place based on the understanding that you have gained by finding peace within yourself.

What are some of the ways each of you finds peace within yourself?

EM: My Jewish tradition teaches *davening* (being in prayer), Jewish meditation and most importantly,

honoring *Shabbat*—a day of rest, a day dedicated to prayer, to being with family, friends and community—a day apart from work. *Shabbat* provides me a sense of balance as I travel the world, offering a break from my computer and my cell phone. While some see the laws of *Shabbat* as restrictive or oppressive, for me they are actually a God-send, giving me time for the renewal of my soul.

SB: I think that if you believe in God, you really have to understand that God is Peace. In Islam, one of God's names is *Salaam*, meaning peace. As a believer of any faith, you have to establish peace because if you don't have peace within yourself and with others how can you believe in God whose name is Peace? You have to believe it and you have to do it!

How do you think praying for peace makes a difference?

SB: God has said, "*Pray to Me, I will answer you.*" (Qur'an, 40; 60) In our need, we appeal to God, our creator and the one who takes care of us. We say, "God help us," and "God, heal us." So, we must pray for peace, not just the Muslim and the Jew, the Catholic and the Protestant, but everyone in this world. If we keep saying, "God, we want peace," God will answer us and help us establish peace.

EM: It is not enough just to pray for peace, it is about being at peace. I feel there must be a way to connect activism with the spiritual path, to see the wholeness and interconnectedness of life and to act from the

place we reach through our spiritual understanding of the world. It is part of our responsibility to elevate the sparks of holiness, *netzutzot shel kedushah*, that are hidden in every corner of creation. We can do this by blessing—the food we eat, the occasions in our lives, working for peace and healing the brokenness in our world.

So when you pray for peace, what do you ask of God?

EM: I pray for the healing of Abraham's family, for healing of the woundedness that leads us to believe in the illusion that we are separate. We are children of Abraham—whether our mother is Sarah or Hagar. If we can begin to see ourselves as part of the same family then we can begin to realize that in our conflict, we are playing out dysfunctional family dynamics. Let us, Israelis and Palestinians, awaken to the fact that we are indeed one family, destined by birth and inheritance to share the land. May this land come to be called the Land of Peace.

SB: I ask God as the father of all creation to help us create peace within ourselves and all around the world. I believe from deep inside that God will answer our prayers. We must do our part and really care about others because God has said, "I will care for you as you care for others."

EM: When Sheikh Bukhari and I lead prayer at public gatherings,* we integrate traditional prayers from Islam and Judaism. *Shalom* in Hebrew is one of God's sacred

* As in The Big Hug of Jerusalem on page 17.

names. In Arabic, *Salaam* is one of the ninety-nine names for Allah. So, for example, we hold hands and begin to chant *Shalom* and *Salaam*, repeating the sacred names over and over. The chanting of these sacred names from both traditions calms the uneasy spirit of separation, helping people to feel safe and included because both Islam and Judaism are being honored. We feel the spirit of peace come upon us, dispelling the anger, rage and traumatic wounds that have been inflicted upon both Arabs and Jews.

Do you as colleagues working for peace ever have a difference of opinion and how do you resolve it?

SB: We have differences of opinions in many things but showing respect and understanding is more important than our differences. A difference does not make you my enemy or my opponent—I don't have to hate you. Even with my brother, my wife, or my children, we don't agree on many things but they are still my family. We have to respect others, their beliefs and opinions. Disagreement doesn't mean we have to fight with others to force them to believe what we believe. I often wonder why Jews, Christians and Muslims focus on and even fight over the three per cent of our scriptures that differ while ignoring the other ninety-seven per cent we have in common. No basis of religion asks people to kill each other. If we're all going to love each other in the end, why wait until then?

EM: As Sheikh Bukhari has said we have differences of opinion, ones that sometimes lead to disagreement,

but we ultimately find a way to support each other. We try really hard to maintain an equal working relationship as we run our organization. We try to have equal numbers of Arabs and Jews involved in decision-making. People often ask me, "Are you left-wing or right-wing?" I reply, "It takes two wings to fly, and we can fly when we work together towards harmony and wholeness, when we speak from the heart and learn to respect each other's differences."

How do you respond to those who say it's easy to say we should be at peace, but how are we to resolve the very real issues that divide us, most especially in Jerusalem?

EM: There is always dialogue between the Israeli and Palestinian secular politicians and they often think religious people are part of the problem, not the solution. In Jerusalem in particular, our work is to bring into the circle of dialogue the spiritual leaders from religious communities on all sides, to have them at the table—to bring in respect for principles found in all faiths to help serve as a bridge in the peace process and to find practical arrangements acceptable within Judaism and Islam, as well as Christianity. We share a love for the land and for the city of Jerusalem. It's easy to blame Israeli society and the occupation or Palestinian incitement and suicide bombings for our problems; but if we are to achieve peace, we have to address the deep underlying issue that we are two deeply wounded peoples inhabiting the same land whether we like it or not, destined and blessed to have to figure out how to live together in peace, without high

walls separating us. We have to develop an inclusive world view, a win/win for everyone, acknowledging that each side has a claim to space and a right to be here. Without this, any peace process will collapse. Any solution has to address the fears, as well as the hopes and dreams of both communities. We must not continually think only about the lowest common denominator, what separates us; rather, we need to focus on the vision, the peace for which we all yearn.

SB: It is difficult to live in a country where everything is tense—where people are living on edge and it is hard for them to control their nerves and their anger. We try to teach people that no matter how angry they become, they should not allow violence to overtake them. When you are really with other people and you begin to understand their problems, their lives and their situations, you begin to experience what it is like to live life from their perspective. For example, I went to one of the concentration camps and saw with my own eyes what happened to the Jews in Germany; I could not hold back my tears at the site of the Selections. I understand now why some Jews are motivated by a fear of survival. I can appreciate why they feel both Jerusalem and Palestine belong to the Jewish people. Such understanding and respect can set us on the path to compromise. Compromise, not violence, is the way to a solution. We call ourselves educated, smart, knowledgeable and wise. All of these

*Can we
find the
seeds for
peace from
Jerusalem's
olive trees?*

are beautiful words but when it comes to reality, when we want to settle differences—many want to use force. This is not the way of educated people. As Rabbi Dov Maimon has said, “We can use the religious texts and authorities of Judaism and Islam to speak out against abuse of religion on any side. We can look at coexistence from both the Jewish and Muslim points of view and try to create Jewish and Muslim principles that can guide us. Then, we can go to schools and to the masses to teach these values.”

EM: One principle we work with as Jerusalem Peacemakers is *holy hutzpa*—it takes a lot of *hutzpa* (audacity) to hurt another person in the name of religion, of God, of what someone feels that God told them as a Jew, Muslim or Christian about this land. My Rebbe, Shlomo Carlebach, says we must have *holy hutzpa* to believe that peace is possible; to believe that in the name of God and spirituality we can be a bridge for healing and reconciliation. *Yerushalayim* is the Hebrew name for Jerusalem. *Yeru* means “you will see” and *shalayim* is a double form of *shalom*. Our tradition holds there are two Jerusalems, the heavenly and the earthly. Right now there is a gap between them. Our work is to unite the two so that *Yerushalayim* becomes *Yerushalom*, meaning “you will see” in one unified Jerusalem “a whole peace.”

To integrate the heavenly Jerusalem with the earthly Jerusalem, we are bringing religion and spirituality in as a bridge, a pathway to peace for Israelis and Palestinians to define the land in a way that even a Hamas supporter and a settler can agree upon.

The Big Hug of Jerusalem

Shira Tamir



On a beautiful Monday this past May, thousands of Jews, Muslims, Christians and others from around the world gathered for a Big Hug around the Old City of Jerusalem. Its purpose was to encircle this city, the heart of the world, in a blessing of love, and to witness together how our common love for Jerusalem can help us celebrate our differences and live in harmony. Needless to say, our gathering evoked stares of curiosity from passers-by. It was a truly spiritual experience and those who prefer angry, violent political demonstrations stayed away.

Around noon, people of all faiths, young and old (I'm talking from infants to some incredibly adorable elders who appeared to be in their 80s or 90s) assembled on the luscious green lawn of *Hutzot Hayotzer* in preparation for this historic event. This time of making music, drumming, singing, dancing, meditating, laughing, smiling—and oh yes, hugging, lots of spontaneous hugging—proved no less mystical and significant than

Shira Tamir is a freelance writer/singer/student of life who was born in Israel, raised in New York, and currently resides in the Holy Land. Always sensing that there was more to life than meets the eye, Shira is grateful to see the awakening taking place in human consciousness around her and is honored and excited to be a part of it all. www.livinginmyownworld.com



the Big Hug itself. Love was in the air and so was peace and enlightenment, along with a truly passionate hope for a better world.

Of course, the police were all prepared for the event and were circling the area with weapons in hand but they too were occasionally caught smiling—only suddenly to catch themselves and return to “doing their jobs.”

Following the beat of drums and gathering additional curious pedestrians along the way, we set out to encircle the Old City. I’m not going to get into describing the Hug itself because no words can convey the sensation you get when you suddenly find yourself One with the people around you...One with Jerusalem’s ancient, historic walls...One with the world...One with the universe...One with God.

OK, so you might think all of this is nonsense, or you might think all of us are crazy for choosing to participate in such an event, but I can tell you one thing that I now know for sure: When you hug the beautiful city of Jerusalem—Jerusalem hugs you back!

ILLUMINATIONS



Like the bee gathering honey from the different flowers, the wise person accepts the essence of the different scriptures and sees only the good in all religions.

~ Mahatma Gandhi

My soul can see no other remedy more pleasing to God than peace.

~ Catherine of Siena

If there is beauty in character, there will be harmony in the home. If there is harmony in the home, there will be order in the nation. If there is order in the nation, there will be peace in the world.

~ Chinese Proverb

Peace demands the most heroic labor and the most difficult sacrifice. It demands greater heroism than war. It demands greater fidelity to the truth and a much more perfect purity of conscience.

~ Thomas Merton

All things pertaining to spiritual progress in life depend upon peace.

~ Hazrat Inayat Khan

Peace has its victories no less than war, but it doesn't have as many monuments to unveil.

~ Kim Hubbard

For many, the spiritual is utterly central to all we are and do and say.

~ Bishop Desmond Tutu

Mankind must remember that peace is not God's gift to his creatures; it is our gift to each other.

~ Elie Wiesel

The significant problems we have cannot be solved at the same level of thinking with which we created them.

~ Albert Einstein

Everybody can serve. You do not have to have a college degree to serve. You do not have to make your subject and verb agree to serve. You only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love.

~ Martin Luther King, Jr.

Dialogue means taking a vibrant interest in what motivates others, what orients them in the world, what nourishes their growth and gives rise to their most cherished values. To live together in peace we need to know these things about one another and to risk the changes of the heart and mind that may well come when we do.

~ Johann Eck

All you have shall some day be given; Therefore give now, that the season of giving may be yours and not your inheritors.

~ Kahil Gibran

All of us can work for peace. We can work right where we are, right within ourselves, because the more peace we have within our own lives, the more we can reflect into our outer situation.

~ Peace Pilgrim

Practicing Peace in Times of War

Pema Chödrön



War and Peace start in the hearts of individuals. Strangely enough, even though all beings would like to live in peace, our method for obtaining peace over the generations seems not to be very effective: we seek peace and happiness by going to war. This can occur at the level of our domestic situation, in our relationships with those close to us. Maybe we come home from work and we're tired and we just want some peace; but at home all hell is breaking loose for one reason or another, and so we start yelling at people. What is our motivation? We want some happiness and ease and peace, but what we do is get even more worked up and we get everyone else worked up too. This is a familiar scenario in our homes, in our

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Excerpted from Practicing Peace in Times of War by Pema Chödrön. Published by Shambhala Publications, Inc. www.shambhala.com © 2006 and used with permission.

workplaces, in our communities, even when we're just driving our cars. We're just driving along and someone cuts in front of us and then what? Well, we don't like it, so we roll down the window and scream at them.

War begins when we harden our hearts, and we harden them easily—in minor ways and then in quite serious major ways, such as hatred and prejudice—whenever we feel uncomfortable. It's so sad, really, because our motivation in hardening our hearts is to find some kind of ease, some kind of freedom from the distress that we're feeling.

Someone once gave me a poem with a line in it that offers a good definition of peace: "Softening what is rigid in our hearts." We can talk about ending war and we can march for ending war, we can do everything in our power, but war is never going to end as long as our hearts are hardened against each other.

What happens is a chain reaction, and I'd be surprised if you didn't know what I'm talking about. Something occurs—it can be as small as a mosquito buzzing—and you tighten. If it's more than a mosquito—or maybe a mosquito is enough for you—something starts to shut down in you, and the next thing you know, imperceptibly the chain reaction of misery begins: we begin to fan the grievance with our thoughts. These thoughts become the fuel that ignites war. War could be that you smash that little teensy-weensy mosquito. But I'm also talking about war within the family, war at the office, war on the streets, and also war between nations, war in the world.

We often complain about other people's fundamentalism. But whenever we harden our hearts, what is going on with us? There's an uneasiness and then

a tightening, a shutting down, and then the next thing we know, the chain reaction begins and we become very righteous about our right to kill the mosquito or yell at the person in the car or whatever it might be. We ourselves become fundamentalists, which is to say we become very self-righteous about our personal point of view.

Jarvis Masters, who is a prisoner on death row, has written one of my favorite spiritual books, called *Finding Freedom*. In a chapter called "Angry Faces," Jarvis has his TV on in his cell but he doesn't have the sound on because he's using the light of the TV to read. And every once in a while, he looks up at the screen, then yells to people down the cell block to ask what's happening.

The first time, someone yells back, "It's the Ku Klux Klan, Jarvis, and they're all yelling and complaining about how its the blacks and the Jews who are responsible for all these problems." About half an hour later, he yells again, "Hey, what's happening now?" And a voice calls back, "That's the Greenpeace folks. They're demonstrating about the fact that the rivers are being polluted and the trees are being cut down and the animals are being hurt and our Earth is being destroyed." Some time later, he calls out again, "Now what's going on?" And someone says, "Oh Jarvis, that's the U.S. Senate and that guy who's up there now talking, he's blaming the other guys, the other side, the other political party, for all the financial difficulty this country's in."

Jarvis starts laughing and he calls down, "I've learned something here tonight. Sometimes they're wearing Klan outfits, sometimes they're wearing Greenpeace outfits, sometimes they're wearing suits and ties, but they all have the same angry faces."



Artist: Alfred A. Gockel, image provided by A.D. Lines EuroGroup, Inc.

I remember reading once about a peace march when one group was coming back from the march, some pro-war people started cutting them off and blocking them; everyone started screaming and hitting each other. I thought, "Wait a minute, is there something wrong with this picture? Clobbering people with your peace sign?" The next time you get angry, check out your righteous indignation, check out your fundamentalism that supports your hatred

*According to
Buddhist
teachings
difficulty is
inevitable in
human life.*

of this person, because this one really is bad—this politician, that leader, those heads of big companies. Or maybe it's rage at an individual who has harmed you personally or harmed your loved ones. A fundamentalist mind is a mind that has become rigid. First the heart closes, then the mind becomes hardened into a view, then you can justify your

hatred of another human being because of what they represent and what they say and do.

If you look back at history or you look at any place in the world where religious groups or ethnic groups or racial groups or political groups are killing each other, or families have been feuding for years and years, you can see—because you're not particularly invested in that particular argument—that there will never be peace until somebody softens what is rigid in their heart. So it's necessary to take a big perspective on your own righteousness and your own fundamentalism when it begins to kick in and you think your own aggression and prejudice are reasonable.

I try to practice what I preach; I'm not always that good at it but I really do try. The other night, I was getting hard-hearted, closed-minded, and fundamentalist about somebody else, and I remembered this expression that you can never hate somebody if you stand in their shoes. I was angry at him because he was holding such a rigid view. In that instant I was able to put myself in his shoes and I realized, "I'm just as riled up, and self-righteous, and closed-minded about this as he is. We're in exactly the same place!" And I saw that the more I held on to my view, the more polarized we would become, and the more we'd be just mirror images of one another—two people with closed minds and hard hearts who both think they're right, screaming at each other. It changed for me when I saw it from his side, and I was able to see my own aggression and ridiculousness.

If you could have a bird's-eye perspective on the earth and could look down at all the conflicts that are happening, all you'd see are two sides of a story where both sides think they're right. So the solutions have to come from a change of heart, from softening what is rigid in our hearts and minds.

One of the most inspiring modern examples we have of this is the civil rights movement. I was recently rereading the writings of Martin Luther King, Jr., and I understood once again that the whole movement was based on love—love that doesn't exclude anybody. This is also the Buddhist idea of love. In this view, you want everybody to be healed.

Now, some political activists might say, "OK, but nothing will ever change just by holding that all-inclusive, loving view." But the truth is, when you take that view and you begin to live by it, at the level of your own heart

in your own everyday life, something begins to shift very dramatically, and you begin to see things in a different way. You begin to have the clarity to see injustice happening, but you can also see that injustice, by its very definition, is harming everybody involved. It's harming the people who are being oppressed or abused, and it's harming those who are oppressing and abusing.

And from a Buddhist point of view, those who are being oppressed have a chance—just as people did in the civil rights movement—to be purified by what is happening to them. They have the opportunity to let hatred be replaced by love and compassion and to try to bring about change by nonviolence and nonaggression. Instead of sinking into self-absorption they have a chance to let their suffering link them with the suffering of all beings—those harming, those helping, and those feeling neutral. In other words, they have a chance to soften what is rigid in their hearts and still hold the view that injustice is being done and work toward unwinding that injustice or that cruelty.

But those who are oppressing may be so prejudiced and rigid in their minds that there's very little opportunity for them to grow and learn. So they're the ones who ultimately suffer the most, because their own hatred and anger and prejudice continue to grow. There is nothing that causes more pain and suffering than to be consumed by bigotry, to be consumed by cruelty and anger.

So war and peace start in the human heart. Whether that heart is open or whether that heart closes has global implications.

Recently, I was teaching from a Buddhist text called *The Way of the Bodhisattva*, which offers guidance to those who wish to dedicate their lives to alleviating suffering and to bring benefit to all sentient beings. This was

composed in the eighth century in India by a Buddhist master named Shantideva. In it he has an interesting point to make about peace. He says something along the lines of, "If these long-lived, ancient, aggressive patterns of mine that are the wellspring only of unceasing woe, that lead to my own suffering as well as the suffering of others, if these patterns still find their lodging safe within my heart, how can joy and peace in this world ever be found?"

Shantideva is saying that as long as we justify our own hard-heartedness and our own self-righteousness, joy and peace will always elude us. We point our fingers at the wrongdoers, but we ourselves are mirror images; everyone is outraged at everyone else's wrongness.

And then Shantideva makes another thought-provoking point. He says that the people who we get so upset at, they eventually move away or they die. And likewise, with nations that fight each other, time passes and either the nations no longer exist or they shift alliances and enemies become allies. He reminds us how everything changes with time. But the negative seeds that are left in our mindstream, the impact of our hatred and our prejudice, is very long-lived. Why so? Because as long as we keep strengthening our anger and self-righteousness with our thoughts and our words and our actions, they will never go away. Instead, we become expert at perfecting our habits of hard-heartedness, our own particular brand of rigid heart and closed mind.

So what I'm advocating here is something that requires courage—the courage to have a change of heart. The

*Solutions
have to
come
from a
change of
heart.*

reason this requires courage is because when we don't do the habitual thing, hardening our heart and holding tightly to certain views, then we're left with the underlying uneasiness that we were trying to get away from. Whenever there's a sense of threat, we harden. And so if we don't harden, what happens? We're left with that uneasiness, that feeling of threat. That's when the real journey of courage begins. This is the real work of the peacemaker, to find the soft spot and the tenderness in that very uneasy place and stay with it. If we can stay with the soft spot and stay with the tender heart, then we are cultivating the seeds of peace.



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P O E T R Y



Rain

Kelly Cassidy

In the rain many are running,
And try to dodge the drops that head for them.
In the rain many see darkness,
And pray for the sun to shine again.

In the rain are those who stand,
And feel the cleansing rush of cool water.
In the rain are those that see its beauty,
And the purity and growth it brings.

In the rain there is time for silence,
And time to renew the soul.
In the rain there is peace,
And knowing the rain makes the sun so much brighter.

Kelly Cassidy is a poet and aspiring writer who focuses on spiritual growth and understanding of the life journey. She has over ten years of wide ranging studies in spiritual enlightenment and her aim is to relay personal experience in a way that inspires thought and manifests positive change. Kelly lives in Delaware with her dog Karma.

Amongst the Junipers and Pines

Robert J. Schout

Amongst the junipers and pines.
on a dusty red rock gardened slope,
where the billions of nature's creatures and I sit;
there, in the pristine silence, I hear all.

I see the bustle of a universe and its creatures
hitherto unnoticed by human eye,
scampering about in a world of their own,
graciously oblivious to all but the timbers and the slope.

I hear the breath of nature;
Mother Earth inhaling and exhaling her love
for all life;
her wind whispering in my ear.

Attuned to the echo of the Universe,
Its rhythmic hum pulsating through my being,
I too become one with its vibration,
I am still.

I feel the peace of heaven on this earth.
I see that we are all one with another,
all intertwined in the fabric of life.
On this slope, amongst the junipers and pines.

I know God.

Bob Schout is a writer, speaker, personal life coach and pastoral counselor. His mission is to be a catalyst of love, life and light in this world, helping every person realize the depth of goodness in and around them. His poetry and prose is meant to illumine the mind and inspire the soul.

Leaves About to Let Go

Rumi

This world of two gardens, both so beautiful.
This world, a street where a funeral is passing.

Let us rise together and leave *this world*,
as water goes bowing down itself to the sea.

From gardens to the gardener,
from grieving to a wedding feast.

We tremble like leaves about to let go.
There is no avoiding pain,
or feeling exiled, or the taste of dust.

But also we have a green-winged longing
for the sweetness of the friend.

These forms are evidence of what cannot be shown.
Here is how it is to go into that:
Rain that has been leaking into the house
decides to use the downspout.

The bent bowstring straining at our throats
releases and becomes the arrow.

Mice quivering in fear of the housecat
suddenly change to half-grown lion cubs,
afraid of nothing.

Excerpted from RUMI: Bridge to the Soul, translated by pre-eminent Rumi scholar, Coleman Barks. The book features over 80 newly translated poems of Rumi. Published by Harper One, A Division of Harper Collins Publishers © 2007 and used with permission.

So let us begin the journey home,
with love and compassion for guides,
and grace protecting.

Let your soul turn into an empty mirror
that passionately wants to reflect Joseph.
Hand him your present.

Now let silence speak.
As that begins, we will start out.

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A REFLECTION



Peace: The Fruit of Prayer

Jan Davis



When most of the trees here in Texas are bare, the air is arid, the soil is parched, and the leaves are shriveled, I like to go to the desert for retreat. There is something about that landscape that opens the eyes of my heart to the fullness of creation. Sometimes I go to the Sonoran Desert near Tucson; last year I went to one of my favorite places, the Wild Horse Desert of South Texas. *Lebh Shomea* is there, a contemplative-eremitical house of prayer that allows one to enter a silence so deep that a listening heart senses God whispering in the breezes. I imagine God rustling about in the cool of the day, a knowable Presence, blessing all that is and making the day holy. I experience a growing awareness that to understand prayer is to understand the simple but essential truth that we yearn for God and God

Jan Davis finds the desert beauty as inviting as the lambent breezes of her native Gulf Coast. She now lives in San Antonio with her husband who is a Disciples of Christ pastor. They are both Benedictine Oblates. Jan is a Catholic lay minister, retreat leader, and spiritual director. www.unfoldingfullpotential.com

yearns for us. So I turned to the prayer from Ignatius of Loyola known as the *Suscipe*:

Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty,
my memory, my understanding, and my entire will,
all that I have and call my own.
You have given it all to me. To you, Lord, I return it.
Everything is yours; do with it what you will.
Give me only your love and your grace.
That is enough for me.

It was easy to pray this prayer the first time; then I realized what I was saying. Surrender is a desert experience; long, arduous, and painful. Peace began to find its place in my heart when I let go of my grocery list of petitions, life-sapping illusions and unrealistic expectations and prayed again and again, "Your love and grace are enough for me." The landscape of my life was much the same but the inscape of my soul, no longer barren, began to bloom.

Soon after I left *Lebh Shomea*, I stopped at a roadside fruit stand. The scent of Valley lemons piled high in wooden crates reminded me of my childhood lemonade stands on Eighteenth Street. I bought a dwarf lemon tree that surprised me before long with bountiful blossoms, sweet perfume-scented blooms. I could hardly wait to see the tiny green knobby orbs appear. Ah, the sweet delight of nature's unfolding!

Planting the seeds of peace through prayer is like planting a citrus tree that predictably grows from seed to stalk, from trunk to limb, from limb to leaf, from leaf to blossom, from blossom to fruit. Peace, the fruit of prayer, often takes its form in dry,

desert-like conditions but soon opens to the warmth and wonder of the eternal embrace. Prayer adds rich nutrients to the soil of our souls, blossoming into virtuous habits of humility, love, patience and fidelity. When we pray, "Lord, give us only your love and your grace that is enough for us," we reach a peaceful, childlike assurance that we have found our place in the universe. Then, just as fruit takes possession of the blossom, so peace takes possession of our souls and we become peacemakers.



P R A Y E R S



Face to Face/Faith to Faith

Our God,
Come down from heaven
And dwell among us.
Turn us face to face.
Stretch out our ears;
Pull back our blinders.
Switch on our holy sparks.

Then, grant me the courage to tell my story.
Then, make room in my heart for my sister's.
And when I go home,
Give me the wisdom to know
When to share my story
And when to share hers.
Blessed are You, God, Keeper of stories.

~ *Justus Baird*

Rabbi Justus Baird is the director of the Center for Multifaith Education at Auburn Theological Seminary, New York City. He has served congregations and hospitals in several states, and is currently the spiritual leader for the Reform Jewish Community of Barnegat, NJ. He lives in Princeton with his wife, Rabbi Julie Roth.

Children of Peace

O God, who art the unsearchable abyss of peace,
the ineffable sea of love, the fountain of blessings
and the bestower of affection,
who sends peace to those that receive it;

Open to us this day the sea of thy love
and water us with plenteous streams
from the riches of thy grace
and from the sweetest springs of thy kindness.

Make us children of quietness and heirs of peace,
enkindle in us the fire of thy love;
sow in us thy fear;
strengthen our weakness by thy power;
bind us closely to thee and to each other
in our firm and indissoluble bond of unity.

~ *Syrian Clementine Liturgy*

May Harmony Triumph (English Translation)

May understanding obedience
conquer ignorant disobedience!
May harmony triumph over discord,
and generosity of spirit over covetous avarice!
and may respect replace derision.

~ *Homi Gandhi, The Federation of
Zoroastrian Assoc. of North America*

A City of God

O God, grant us a vision of this city,
fair as it might be:
a city of justice, where none shall prey
upon the other;
a city of plenty, where vice and
poverty shall cease to fester;
a city of brotherhood,
where success is founded on service,
and honor is given to nobleness alone;
a city of peace where order shall not rest on force,
but on the love of all for each and all.

~ *Walter Rauschenbusch*
The Gift of Prayer

A Shinto Prayer for Peace

Although the people living
across the ocean
surrounding us, I believe,
are all our brothers and sisters,
why are there constant troubles in
this world?

Why do winds and waves rise in the
oceans surrounding us?

I only earnestly wish that the wind will
soon puff away all the clouds which are
hanging over the tops of mountains.

~ *UN Prayer for Peace*

An Urban Peace

Alexie M. Torres-Fleming



The fires that led to the devastation of the South Bronx in the late 60's and early 70's still rage in my mind. I witnessed them day after day as a little girl perched on the ledge of my ninth floor window in the Bronx River Public Housing Projects. I was too little to understand things like "Planned Shrinkage," "Urban Renewal," "Disinvestment" and "White Flight." All I knew is that they were frightening and tumultuous times for me and all of the children of the South Bronx. No wonder so many of us ran away, understanding only that our success in life would be measured by how far from the "ghetto" we could someday escape.

In this sea of uncertainty, hundreds of young people, like myself, became anchored to the love offered us at the youth group of Holy Cross Church. There we were formed as leaders and guided in the Franciscan principles of simplicity and servant

Alexie M. Torres-Fleming is Founder and Executive Director of Youth Ministries for Peace and Justice (YMPJ), a center for urban ministry dedicated to fostering peace and justice through youth and community development.

leadership. It was our sanctuary, a place of refuge during those difficult adolescent years.

Teetering on the edges of two very different realities, I began to grapple with the same questions that many young people confront. I asked, "Does the God I know in *there* see what is going on out *here*?" "Does the One I worship on Sunday understand how ugly it can be on Monday?" "Does God care?" I prayed that I could find a place where my faith could do more than get me to heaven, because all hell seemed to be breaking loose around me.

I had to experience one final fire before my questions were answered. In 1992 after Father Mike, pastor of Holy Cross, led the parish in an anti-drug prayer march, drug dealers vandalized and torched the church in retaliation. Led by Father Mike with the youth group, we refused to let evil and despair have the last word. We marched again. That day as I witnessed the sea of people, children, mothers pushing baby strollers, elderly men and women, immigrant families...those whom the world would consider powerless, I understood so very clearly what true power was! It was at this time, God spoke to me through his children, from the center to the margins, as we came together not just hoping for miracles or praying for change, but making change manifest by the power of the human will and the courage to stand up and do something!

Youth Ministries for Peace and Justice was born on that day. Throughout the past thirteen years, we have worked to create a space that forms young

people to be prophetic voices for peace and justice and we have dared to believe two fundamental things:

1. We can rebuild our neighborhood.
2. Armed with faith and trained as community organizers, youth can lead that movement.

And so they brilliantly have!!! Their accomplishments are numerous. They lead campaigns for environmental justice, community health, decent housing, police reform, education and immigration.

I no longer despair or wonder if God CARES. I have seen God bend down to pick up garbage along the Bronx River...I have heard her testify at hearings against highways that bring trucks and soot and asthma into my neighborhood...I have heard him stand up against the police officer that would stop and frisk him simply because he is a brown child. I see God in the young people and staff of Youth Ministries for Peace and Justice every day.

Of Faiths and Foes

Abdullah Adil



Box in a box, inside another box. This is the simplest way to describe our lives nowadays. Even worse, each box has a lock and all the keys are lost. Yet there, in the middle of the darkness—in the middle of nowhere—something shines, something called faith. It extends hands to pull us out, and in that contact, lock after lock will be broken.

If we open our eyes, ears and minds, we'll see that our different faiths are bonds that will draw us closer and closer to each other. When a friend and I argue over a religious issue, the conversation lasts no more than a few minutes. Each of us is afraid to anger the other. What if our anger is okay? Sometimes, to reach the truth, we have to be open. I am not afraid to talk about my religion, but I am afraid when others do not listen. By listening, I do not mean believing, but understanding!

Great civilizations of the past ended when different faiths clashed. We are not so different from those people in the past. We can either do what they did, or we can take

Abdullah Adil is a 2006 participant and a 2007 leader in training of Face to Face | Faith to Faith, an international, multifaith youth leadership program sponsored by Auburn Theological Seminary in partnership with Common Ground. Abdullah was born in Iraq and now lives in Denver.

From Peace Talks, the Face to Face | Faith to Faith Newsletter, Spring 2007 and used with permission.

the seemingly harder way: STOP, WATCH, and LISTEN. Maybe if we really begin to listen to our faiths and allow inner peace to transform us step by step, we can start listening to our foes, our friends, and to the voices within.

When we listen closely, our faiths are no longer barriers; rather, they are our bridges to peace.

BOOKS FOR THE JOURNEY



It is books that are a key to the wide world; if you can't do anything else, read all that you can.
~ Jane Hamilton, *The Book of Ruth*

Wisdom Walk: Nine Practices for Creating Peace and Balance from the World's Spiritual Traditions
by Sage Bennet
New World Library, 2007

After experiencing her own crisis of faith, Sage Bennet developed an eclectic spiritual life, borrowing rituals from many religions and traditions. In *Wisdom Walk* she outlines some of the most powerful of those practices, making them accessible to contemporary readers without diminishing or disrespecting their subtle nuances. Drawing from Hinduism, she explains how to create a home altar as a reminder of a larger spiritual presence. She explores how Buddhist meditation helps one find peace. From Islam comes surrendering to prayer, and from Christianity the practice of forgiveness. There's even Native American spirituality in the form of a chapter on letting nature be one's teacher. A final, summarizing chapter brings together all the traditions, demonstrates their fundamental unity, and discusses the importance of offering oneself in service to others. *Wisdom Walk* provides a simple, easy-to-follow guide for bringing the world's spiritual traditions into one's life through practical, powerful rituals.

~ *Publishers Review*

ENDPIECE



The Babemba Tribe

Alice Walker

Where do we start? How do we reclaim a proper relationship to the world?

It is said that in the Babemba tribe of South Africa, when a person acts irresponsibly or unjustly, he is placed in the center of the village, alone and unfettered.

All work ceases, and every man, woman and child in the village gathers in a large circle around the accused individual. Then each person in the tribe speaks to the accused, one at a time, about all the good things the person in the center of the circle has done in his lifetime. Every incident, every experience that can be recalled with any detail and accuracy is recounted. All his positive attributes, good deeds, strengths and kindnesses are recited carefully and at length.

The tribal ceremony often lasts several days. At the end, the tribal circle is broken, a joyous celebration takes place, and the person is symbolically and literally welcomed back into the tribe.

Alice Walker, best known for her Pulitzer Prize winning novel The Color Purple, continues to receive praise for her current works of poetry, fiction and nonfiction. Walker is an advocate for feminist, environmental and civil rights.

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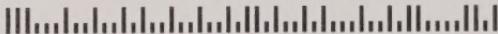
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Vol. 58, No. 5

October/November 2007

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ISSN 1096-5939

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